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State - Church relations in the history of educational policy of the first post-communist Hungarian government

In the midwar history of the Hungarian Education the Churches played more significant role then the European average. The great churches - the Catholic, the Calvinist, the Lutheran and the Israelite - controlled the overwhelming majority of schools before the nationalisation of schools in 1948.

1. table:

The percent of students by the owner of schools, and by the school-types in the 1935/36 school year

typeOwner	elemt.school	Burgerschool	Gymn	Real-sch.	Real-gymn
State	23,9	38,5	6,9	75,7	49,7
St.Cath	0	0	0	0	4,1
Municip	13,1	37,4	4,9	18,6	0,6
RomCath	39,7	16,5	45,1	0	20,4
Gr. Cath	1,7	0	0	0	0
Calvinist	14,8	0	25,7	0	11,9
Lutheran	3,9	0	8,3	0	6,3
Orthodox	0,1	0	0	0	0
Israelite	1,3	1,1	0	0	3,1
Private	1,8	4,4	0	5,7	0,9
Together	100	100	100	100	100
Together,absolut number, in thousends	960	91	14,4	7	31,8

(Some important fact to understand the table:

"State Catholic" - The schools of Hungarian Educational Found, supervised as direct as the state schools, but managed by the catholic orders.
Burger School - a kind of lower secondary school for the lower middle class, and working class age 10-14.
Gymnasium: Classical secondary school with Latin and Greek, age 10-18,
Realgymnasium: The mostly supported school type of government with Latin and modern language, age 10-18,
Realschool: secondary school with modern languages and sciences, age 10-18.)

This role had historical and ideological reasons: in the midwar period and after 1945 the churches - and the believers - could not finance this huge school system. The process of secularisation had started in the 19th century but it grew in strength in the post Second World War period.

But the nationalisation of the schools did not merely follow this secularisation process but it was forced even further by the communist regime. After the nationalisation, since the 1950s less then 10 church-run secondary schools operated in Hungary. These schools were financed by the state, and the curriculum - except the Weltanschauung - was similar to that at state schools.

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In the last period of communism the attitude towards church schooling changed. The newspaper which was controlled by the nationalist wing of reform-communists started to emphasise that the nationalisation of schools belonged to the "Stalinist features of Socialism". (In addition to being an attack

against Stalinism, it also attacked the liberal and modernist argumentation, which in the 1970s and 1980s stressed that the nationalisation of church schools was also the aim of the Hungarian liberal and democratic forces in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the Socialist Revolution fulfilled this aim among many of its own.)

The reform-communist regime moved the supervision of the state-church relationship from the State-Church Office (which was described as a tool of Stalinism) to The Ministry of Education. The Minister of Education declared in 1989 that the "reprivatisation of church schools is in the national interest".

The first concrete instances of reprivatisation facilitated the expansion of western oriented foreign policy: George Bush visited the first newly reopened Lutheran school; the American Embassy was actively involved in reopening the first Calvinist school.

The first conflict happened when the Calvinist church - the lay heads of the church and some emigrants - started to urge for the reprivatisation of one of the famous schools of the Budapest elite. The ministry, which was interested in demonstrating its new relationship to the churches, offered the building to the Calvinist Church. But the users of the school building at the time - a secularised elite of Budapest - did not want "to be shifted" from a state school to a church school, and the leader of the educational administration of the city attacked the minister in the press.

During the same time a lot of things happened in the parliament. An act in 1990 changed the Education

Act of 1985 and gave churches the right to open as many schools as they wished. The annual budget was changed and it offered the same amount of money from the central budget to both church-run and state-run schools - it was a kind of "money follow pupil" system. Since in this system the church had a right to ask for a fee while the state schools were free of charge, the financial situation of the church schools became better than that of state schools. The ministry wanted to link this extra state support to a special agreement between the ministry and concrete church schools - but in the end the new act on the Churches guarantied this money without any preconditions.

The same act guarantied the right for the churches to deliver religious instruction in public schools "as a facultative subject".

A right wing coalition won the 1990 elections. The biggest party, the Hungarian Democrats Forum, was an umbrella party of different right wing forces: old and new conservatives, populists, the extreme right - practically all of them emphasised the Christian-conservative-national tradition as a central ideology of the party. One of the smaller coalition partners - the Christian Democratic People's Party - had concrete links with the leadership of the Catholic Church. The other small partner , the party of "smallholders" , collected its voters from among the least educated, elderly village people: this group is the most religious one in Hungarian society.

The first case of reprivatisation after the election showed that the privatisation on the basis of claims and on the basis of historical argumentation - a very different phenomenon.

The Association of Christian Intellectuals - a new force of the civil society - decided to change the "spirit" of a secondary school in Budapest called Arany János School. The owner of the school, the municipality, which was still a non- elected one yet, turned down this plan. After this decision, the Saint Marie Society, an organisation which had been the owner of the building before the Second World War, but at the time had no concrete plans in connection with the school, requested the return of the school . The MP of the district (a right wing politician) supported this request. To sum it up: a really existing social group with a real social claim requested the school - but this aim was not supported either by the government or the municipality, but when a traditional "quasi-association" requested it on the basis of a historical argumentation, it was immediately supported by the government party politicians.

The same case showed the conflict existing between the bureaucratic rationalism and political aims. The legal department of the ministry declared that the parents' constitutional right to choose their children's' school, did not mean that they had the right to change the spirit of an existing school. The minister himself, in face of opposition from his own apparatus, still supported the aim of the Saint Marie Society. It was a typical conflict between political and bureaucratic rationalism.

In September this year the Christian democrats focused their policy on defending the municipal schools which had previously chosen the Christian spirit. The Christian democrats suggested legislation to create a new type of schools: "state- financed

church school". The Hungarian Democratic Forum - which controlled more then 40 % of the seats of the parliament, and mean the dominant factor of theright-wing coalition - was the only party absent during the political/professional meeting which was held to discuss this suggestion. It seemed that the biggest government party had reached a compromise with the Christian democrats in so much as the Christian democrats obtained a kind of hegemony over religious policy. (Later, as a gesture, the opening speech of the parliamentary debate on the act concerning the reprivatisation of the properties which had formerly belonged to the Churches was delivered not by the minister but the State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, because he was also one of the leaders of the Christian Democratic People's Party.)

The new parliament had inherited from the last communist parliament a plan of reprivatisation of properties which had belonged to the churches before 1948. But the new majority - with Christian/conservative parties!!! - did not start to debate the plan. It seems, that the new government parties were sure that they would won the municipal election of the autumn of 1990: and they did not want to make complicate the situation of their own local elites. (The municipal act, as one of the most important element of the new constitutional order gave the schools to the hand of municipalities) But not the government parties won the local election. In the greatest part of towns and cities the liberal parties got majorities, in the villages the ex-communist ex-lord majors became lord major again. In this situation the government parties gave green line for the plan of reprivatisation of the properties which had formerly belonged to the Churches. In the

spring of 1991 the act passed in the parliament. All of the other actors of political life opposed this act: the liberal parties, the Socialist Party, the alliances of municipalities, the teachers trade unions.

This act made the hierarchy of the churches much stronger, because - from this point not the claim of believers initiated the opening of new church schools, but the decision of the church leaders: they have to decide which buildings are requested among the whole historical property-complex. The government, and the leader elite of government parties intertwined the leaders of the historical churches. The head of the Hungarian Benedictine order told himself: the act of reprivatisation strength the "feudal features" of the Hungarian Catholic Church.

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The success of the passing of reprivatisation act made the ministry very optimist in ideological meaning. The right wing parties and the ministry hoped that the hundreds of new church instructed schools (as they hoped the number) would change the face of Hungarian education. The conception of new educational act (version 1991 November) gave special rights for the church schools. (These rights were much wider then the rights of other private schools) (It made possible a special agreement between the church-schools and the ministry, and gave the supervision of this schools into the hand of churches.)

After a long debate the conception of the ministry (version Nov. of 1991) accepted : The state and municipal schools organises the education on the basis of the Neutrality Weltanschauung.

In this moment it seemed to be a working compromise: the government ambitions about the "Christian renewing of society" would happen in the church schools - and the state/municipal schools would not be involved into the ideological changes.

But at the end of 1991 the first summarisation of the requests of the properties became ready in the ministry. It became clear that the typical case in the process not the changing of the municipal school to a church school, but the divorce of the building and the institution. In the greatest part of the requesting process the municipalities declared: if the government force them to give the building to church they move the institution of school to an other building, and they ask the expenses from the central budget. Their argument was: they lost a "function" : the church school could not fulfil the same function as a municipal school - the municipal school had to be neutral, the church school could not be neutral, naturally.

At the end of 1991 it became clear that the state budget is impossible to compensate all of the "lost municipal function", impossible to finance to building or buying hundreds of new municipal schools instead of old ones (which shhould be shifted to the churches)

So at the turn of 1991/1992 the conception of the government has changed. The new version (January of 1992) did not define the spirit the municipal and church schools separately, but declared: "In the schools - any kind of school (P.T.N.) - the education is organised on the basis of living peace and quietness of different weltanschauungs".

The government suggested a new point into the act: "If there are a request of population for the church school - the municipality has to make an agreement with the church".("The request of the population" as definition opened naturally more possibility for the churches, that "The request of the parents" from two reasons: 1. the majority of parents - almost every concrete school which was requested by the churches - refused the changes, but generally - not speaking about their own kids - the people were more open for the requests of churches. 2. In the population - because of the high percentage of elderly people - the proportion of believers was much higher than among the parents.)

The rights wing parties hoped: after the passing of education act there would be no any obstacle the reprivatisation of the municipal schools; the government would not pay any compensation to municipalities, and the municipalities had to finance the church schools.

To understand the weight of these questions it is necessary to know: in the process of requesting more than 6000 property was pointed out by the churches. In these buildings 1304 elementary school, 31 kindergarten, 61 grammar schools, 51 technical schools, 11 vocational schools and 34 student hostel worked.

But - because of some other reasons - the parliamentary debate of the educational act was postponed. The reprivatisation process were full of conflicts: not only the municipalities and political forces attacked the ambition of churches and government, but the greatest part of parents,

students and teachers stressed: they did not want "to be shifted" to a church school, they did not want to change school - this forces accepted only one solution, generally: if the municipality - using the compensation sources of government - buy or built an other building for them, and move the whole institution.

In this situation that was only one way in the hand of right wing government: giving more money year by year in the compensation fund. At first the smaller coalition partner (the Christian Democrats) pressed the bigger one in the end of 1992. So in the year of 1993 the process of reprivatisation became quicker. The "Kulturkampf" between the churches and government in one side and the majority of teachers and pupils, municipalities on the other side strenghted.

In the end of 1993 the monetarist forces of the greatest government party stopped the extreme ambitions of Christian democrats: the Christian Democrats suggested 10.000 million forint into the Recompensation Found - but the parliament gave only 4.000 million at last. (The national budget in 1992: 990.424 million Ft, the public education (without university level) - cross the municipalities - got 136.072 million Ft)

2. table

	elementary sch.	secondary sch	higher education
The total number of pupils and students in 1993/1994	1009416	406921	133956
The number of pupils and students in the church schools in 1993/1994	19449	10992	4448
The % in 1993/1994	1,93	2,7	3,32
The % in 1994/1995	2,37	3,17	3,39

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The decision of the Constitutional Court is the real turning point of the story. The constitutional court declared that the public education as function of the municipality is lost when the school has been shifted into the hand of the church. The court declared: "the state (municipality) has to offer a possibility for visiting a Neutral school for everybody who does not want to visit church school."..." The people who choose the neutral school has to right to bring smaller self-denial, then the people who want to visit the church school."

This decision was a great success of the liberal opposition. The minister of culture, who declared that the "neutral school - does not exist" had to leave his position in the first weeks of 1993.

The new educational government made a new plan for the educational act. In the version of February of 1993 the government find two solutions to support the church schooling.

1. The government suggested: "The parents has a constitutional right to send their children to a school, which follow their Weltanschauung". The liberal opposition attacked this principle, because it means: the state have to guarantee organising that kind of schools in a village , if there not similar one. Not only the opponers defined what is it mean. The educational officer of the Catholic Church of Hungary described what is it mean too: in his opinion 1.)the parents have right to ask the teachers about their Weltanschauung in the public schools, 2.) it is necessary to order the publishers sign the

"Weltanschauung of text book-writer on the textbooks".

The parliament accept the text of the educational act, as the government suggested, but up to now, that kind of absurdities have not happened.

2. The second important idea of the government was the article about the "agreement about the public education". This article made possible that - on the spring of 1994, when the Public opinion surveys showed that the right wing government would leave its position - the ministry signed an agreement with the churches. The agreement declared that the state in the next 20 year will finance the church school - and not only the normative sum will be given by the state as the act declare it in 1990. It means that one pupil of a church school costs much more for the state-budget, than a pupil of a municipal school.

3. The act made possible the shifting of the municipal schools as institutions to the hand of church. The greatest church/policy conflict of this years belongs this possibility. In a small Hungarian village (namely Dabas-Sari) the right wing municipality gave the municipal school to the Catholic church. There were no other school in the village so the majority parents and teachers - who did not want "to be shifted" to the church could not find an other school. The forces of local "Kulturkampf" was supported from the country level politicians and church leaders. At last the building was separated and two institution - a municipal and a church one - started to work in the building. The catholic bishop initiated to built a real (physical) wall in the building - this wall has become a symbol of the non-flexible behaviour of Catholic

church in the eye of the majority of Hungarian society.

The next parliamentary period 1994-1998 a socio-liberal coalition had to form its new policy concerning the church-state-education relation.

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